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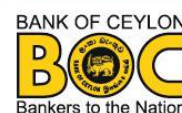
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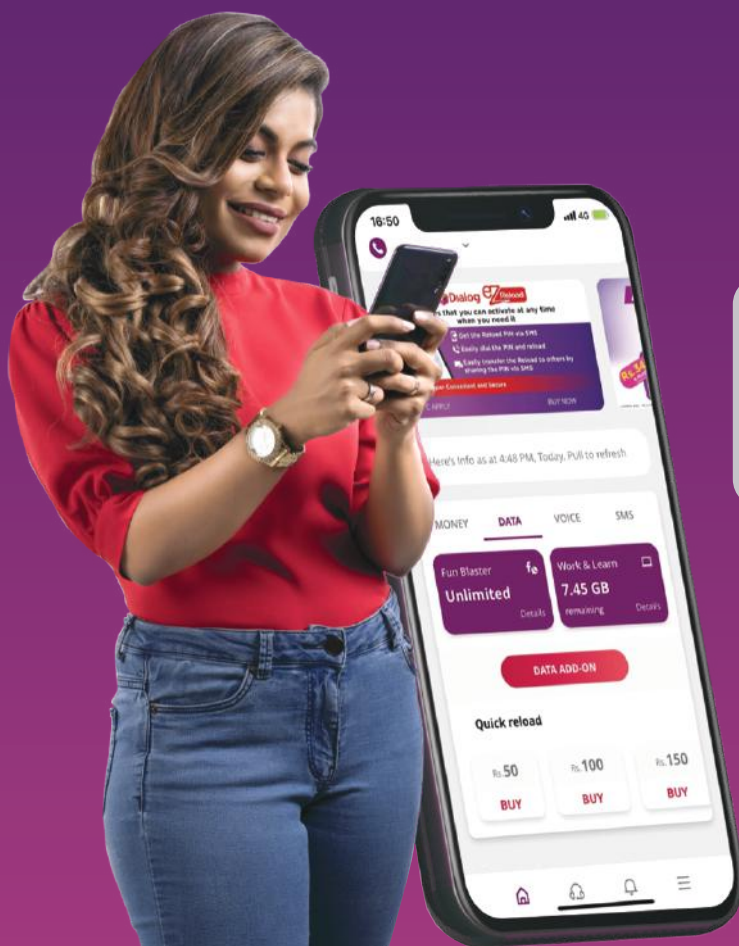
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Dr. Sulochana Segera

As excitement builds for the 11th 'Top50' Professional and Career Women Awards scheduled to take place on 18 January 2022, Women in Management (WIM), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the government of Australia, mark years of partnership in co-hosting the awards that celebrate inspirational Sri Lankan women.

The Top50 awards are to be held on 18th January 2022 for the 11th year running. What is the back story of the awards, and why is it important to recognise women's achievements?

Dr Sulochana Segera :

The start of the Top50 Awards goes all the way back to 2011. It was a time when I noticed that a lot of Sri Lankan women – especially youngsters – looked up to role models from elsewhere, when there were many inspiring women within the country. I wanted to change

this. I wanted to show the country and the world that Sri Lanka has remarkable and inspiring women from all walks of life. And that's how the awards came into play. We started with 25 women and five awards, but now it has evolved into an annual event and more than 470 Sri Lankan women have been celebrated for various achievements over the past decade.

The success of the awards led to many opportunities – especially for the award winners themselves. This was not just about empowering women, but also about highlighting the actual need for having women on boards – which is beneficial for the economy and society as a whole. I think with the awards, we were able to change this narration to some aspect. We took women to the professional fora – by creating platforms for professional networking, leadership conferences and even thought leadership programs. What's interesting is that we also brought the men forward too – as allies and champions of gender equality. There's still a long way to go in achieving gender equality in Sri Lanka, but WIM will continue to do its part always.

How have the awards evolved over the past decades? Could you share some success stories?

Dr Sulochana Segera :

WIM has come a long way over the years, so has the Top50 awards. We've

WIM Founder/Chairperson **Dr. Sulochana Segera**, IFC Program Manager for Women in Work **Sarah Twigg** and Acting Australian High Commissioner for Sri Lanka **Amanda Jewell** discuss how the awards have made lasting impacts on Top50 recipients and organisations, the setbacks shouldered disproportionately by Sri Lankan women during COVID-19, and the path towards equality.

evolved with time, introducing diverse award categories to suit current needs and most importantly, opening up more opportunities for women to shine. On this journey, we have had the support of various partners. Our biggest supporter for the past seven years has been the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the government of Australia since 2018. The Top50 Awards which started in Sri Lanka now covers Maldives, Canada and soon Australia too.

Success stories are many. I've heard of how the Awards have led to career progression for many past winners. Often, Sri Lankan women are hesitant to take their spot in the limelight, but the Top50 Awards have created a platform to showcase their talents and achievements and inspire others. Just to give you an example, Chamila Bandara, the Career Role Model of the Year at 'Top50' Professional and Career Awards 2021 – who is also the Director/Chief Executive Officer of Mountain Hawk Express Licensee of Federal Express Corporation – said how it was a past award winner who encouraged her to apply for the awards when she was shying away. That's the impact we want – women empowering and inspiring

others to move forward.

I am proud to note that the Top50 Awards distinguishes itself by being solely based on the achievements of each individual. We do not charge for nominations. Every year, we have an esteemed and diverse panel of judges who meticulously evaluate every candidate before selecting the best ones. This is a huge undertaking, but our ultimate motive is to highlight the real impact women have made and also for them to inspire others, making a positive difference.

What's interesting is that we do not stop at the awards. We continue to endorse the award winners as brand ambassadors of women leadership and empowerment so they can further inspire other Sri Lankan women.



Achieving gender equality and empowering women is an important aspect in our development program here in Sri Lanka. Gender is one pillar in our development program targeting women as the main beneficiary. Additionally, all our other programs also target women and girls as a specific group. Women in Work, our first standalone gender equality program in Sri Lanka, in partnership with the IFC, provides a tangible way to demonstrate Australia's commitment to women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka.



IFC has been a partner of Top50 awards for several years, supporting WIM in taking the awards to a new level. How has this partnership helped make a difference in Sri Lanka and for Sri Lankan women?

Sarah Twigg :

Through IFC's Women in Work partnership with the government of Australia, we are working to close gender gaps in Sri Lanka's private sector while improving business performance. WIM has been a steadfast partner throughout this journey and has played a critical role in making our vision of promoting women's business leadership for inclusive growth a reality. The Top 50 Awards demonstrate the significant role women play in bringing about transformational change as employees, entrepreneurs, and business leaders. We've seen how the awards have grown over the years – not just in the number of applications but also in terms of impact. Recognizing women who have achieved success in their chosen careers, surpassing roles ascribed by tradition, creates a legacy that galvanizes and motivates others.

Award winners have gone on to become recognized leaders in their respective fields and have been catalysts for change in their organizations and communities. We have seen that more than half the career Award winners experience career advancements, while over 90% of SME and micro business owners recognized by the Awards have reported increased brand recognition and market growth.

What role is the government of Australia playing in terms of uplifting Sri Lankan women?

Amanda Jewell:

Achieving gender equality and empowering women is an important aspect in our development program here in Sri Lanka. Gender is one pillar in our development program targeting women as the main beneficiary. Additionally, all our other programs also target

women and girls as a specific group. Women in Work, our first standalone gender equality program in Sri Lanka, in partnership with the IFC, provides a tangible way to demonstrate Australia's commitment to women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka. Separately, our Sexual and Gender Based Violence program in Mannar seeks to reduce the incidents of violence against women and girls in Northern Sri Lanka, in partnership with UN agencies. Our Skills for Inclusive Growth provides vocational training in the East especially women working in the tourism sector. The Market Development Facility programs seek to promote employment opportunities for women in many sectors including tourism. Australia also provides scholarships and learning opportunities for women to build their skills by accessing Australian educational institutions, through our Australia Awards program.

Amanda Jewell



What are some common forms of stereotyping that successful women have to contend with on a daily basis? And what can both men and women do to counter this?

Dr Sulochana Segera:

The business case for gender equality is compelling – investing in women strengthens the companies they work in and lead. When companies proactively recruit, retain and promote women, they benefit from increased innovation and collaboration, increased productivity, improved employee satisfaction, and are able to position themselves as an employer of choice. They are also better able to serve their clients' and customers' needs, by better representing the diversity of consumers.

Both genders should accept their differences. The change should start from the corporate boards where they provide opportunities based on competencies regardless of gender. A woman should be able to share her opinion and expertise without being labelled 'aggressive'. This is one of the major reasons why many women keep their views to themselves. Also, women should not compete with men on gender but they should compete on delivering results. Men should adjust any perception of women as soft or weak, and should regard their female colleagues as team members or leaders.

Some might scoff at the idea of equality at the workplace, arguing that merit, irrespective of gender, should trump all other considerations. How would you respond to this? How does inclusivity impact the bottom line, in terms of productivity and growth?

Sarah Twigg:

The business case for gender equality is compelling – investing in women strengthens the companies they work in and lead. When companies proactively recruit, retain and promote women, they benefit from increased innovation and collaboration, increased productivity, improved employee satisfaction, and are able to position themselves as an employer of choice. They are also better able to serve their clients' and customers' needs, by better representing the diversity of consumers.

There is also a compelling case for increasing the role of women in corporate decision-making roles. As IFC's new research points out, in Sri Lanka, the top 30 Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE)-listed companies with higher gender diversity perform better on financial metrics such as Return on Equity, Return on Total Assets and

Price to Earnings Ratio. IFC research also demonstrates a strong correlation with gender diversity on boards and in C-suite management, and non-financial performance metrics such as enhanced environmental, social, and governance standards. New evidence is also demonstrating that gender diversity within organizations can have a significant impact in combating climate change, with a 1 percentage point increase in the share of female managers leading to a 0.5% decrease in CO2 emissions.

Women are increasingly taking up leadership positions in business and elsewhere, compared to even a decade ago. But few would disagree that there is still a long way to go. What are some areas, in your opinion, with significant room for improvement in this regard?

Amanda Jewell:

Many forward thinking organisations support women in the workplace as they understand the value of gender parity and inclusion in their organisations, and within leadership positions. Global research has shown that greater inclusion in the workplace is not only the right thing to do, but it is good for business. However more organisations, public and private must work towards parity in top positions to build a more inclusive and sustainable future. The culture of the organisation and the commitment

Sarah Twigg



Although many gender-related barriers and biases have declined over the years, career advancement opportunities for women continue to be negatively affected by gender stereotypes, which shape managerial behaviour and occupational outlooks in the workplace with patriarchal expectations. The theoretical transition from Women in Management to Women and Management did not change the practice of gender stereotyping in society. A few examples we see are male attitudes towards women's success, women's reluctance to work for female bosses, lack of female mentors, successful women being isolated in their leadership and restricted to networking only among successful leaders, and trying to find safe circles to network are some of the barriers.

by top management in creating an inclusive work culture is critical in combatting unconscious biases and negative organisational norms that hold women back. It is the responsibility of the management to build and support a pipeline of women who can access any position by providing equal opportunity to gain the skills and experience that is required to achieve leadership positions. Mentoring by senior management for top positions is key in providing confidence to women to reach the top. Additionally, supportive internal policies should be in place providing women the suitable work environment to achieve their potential. Human resource policies should provide equal opportunities when hiring, grooming, and promoting staff. Flexible and remote work options, regulated & safe childcare options, and parental leave for both genders to take up caregiving responsibilities are also important. All forms of gender-based harassment in the workplace should be addressed and stopped.

The pandemic has been a setback for much of the progress made towards equality. In what ways has COVID-19 impacted working women, and how do you propose Sri Lanka overcome this challenge?

Sarah Twigg:

COVID-19, undoubtedly, has rolled back some hard-won battles in achieving gender equality – which is not just a blow to women and societal progress, but also to economies and businesses. We see women juggling additional household responsibilities and childcare, while also often taking on additional responsibilities at work in response to the crisis. Our studies on the impact of COVID-19 on employment found women were twice as likely as men to report increased household and care responsibilities as a result of the global pandemic. These factors have resulted in more women losing their

jobs due to the pandemic than men. Global estimates suggest women's job loss rates are about 1.8 times higher than men's. There has also been a sharp rise in gender-based violence as a result of lockdowns and the increased financial pressures faced by individuals and families. We have seen increased mental health concerns among employees, with almost one-quarter of women and men

as we all look forward to a resilient recovery, there is an opportunity for the private sector to rebuild with a focus on gender equality. We are seeing greater support for flexible working options across most industries, as well as the rapid uptake of new technologies to help staff and teams to work more efficiently and from locations other than the workplace.

reporting being distracted due to health, stress or mental well-being issues. This can translate into decreased productivity and commitment at work, as well as a range of other negative outcomes for individuals and their employers.

So, as we all look forward to a resilient recovery, there is an opportunity for the private sector to rebuild with a focus on gender equality. We are seeing greater support for flexible working options across most industries, as well as the rapid uptake of new technologies to help staff and teams to work more efficiently and from locations other than the workplace. Companies are re-evaluating their processes and practices to streamline them wherever possible, and to enable employees to better balance work and personal life. We are also seeing companies take proactive steps to support the childcare needs of their employees – for both mothers and fathers – as well as to support the

physical and mental health needs of their workforce. A proactive focus on recruiting, retaining and promoting women among all businesses is critical for ensuring the talent of Sri Lanka's female workforce can be fully utilized in the country's pandemic recovery.

Sri Lanka, and indeed the world, is facing an unprecedented crisis at the moment across multiple fronts – be it public health, finance, education, or business. How can we support these women to continue playing a key role in the country's path to recovery?

Amanda Jewell:

Many women globally are leading the health response, exposing them to a greater risk of infection. At the same time, women are also shouldering much of the burden at home, with school and childcare closures and gender inequalities in unpaid work. Women also have a higher risk of job and income loss, and face increased risks of violence, exploitation, abuse or harassment during times of crisis and quarantine.

Governments and private organisations must adjust policies to support women and their unique needs during the crisis and towards recovery. They must adapt flexible working methods to help parents manage work and caring responsibilities during lockdowns. There is some evidence that women operate businesses with lower levels of capitalisation and are more reliant on self-financing. Globally governments should consider extending access to unemployment benefits to disadvantaged groups and ensure that small women business owners and self-employed women have adequate financial support to survive the crisis and continue to support the economy. Ensuring that service delivery for victims of gender-based violence is integrated across relevant areas such as health, social services, education, employment, and justice.

Top 50

Professional & Career Women Awards

Panel of Judges 2021



Dr. Rohantha Athukorala

Country Head, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Pakistan,
Clouttrack Labs



Jayanthi Dharmasena

Managing Director of Hayleys Agriculture
Holdings Ltd



Nisthar Cassim

Founding Editor and CEO of Daily FT



Amanda Jewell

Acting Australian High Commissioner for
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Nadija Tambiah,

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Dr. Kishu Gomes

Managing Director and CEO of Dreamron
Group of Companies



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Group Chief Customer Officer at
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Santosh Menon

CEO of KL.LK



Sandaya Salgado

Strategic Marketing Professional

It's a little rough. Let me have critical comments

In this challenging year, one of the bright lights has been sitting on this panel celebrating the achievements of talented Sri Lankan Women. Seeing the depth and range of accomplishments has humbled me but also made me so proud as a Sri Lankan.

The quality of the women who were nominated or who applied this year was impressive. So impressive that it took several sessions for the judging panel to decide on some categories. We were forced not only to look at the accomplishments of these women in their chosen vocations but also what impact they have had in the industry and what they have done for women in their organisations.

My heartfelt congratulations to the awardees. None of you did what you did with an expectation of a public accolade. But with these awards we celebrate your accomplishments to light the way for future generations of Sri Lankan women - to give them hope, strength and will to aim for the top.

Sri Lanka is at a delicate point in its journey and I strongly believe that women have a key role to play in the path it forges into the future. Today, as we celebrate that unbreakable spirit of women, working tirelessly to empower themselves and their communities, I want Sri Lankan women to pause, consider and focus on the role that each of you need to play to take Sri Lanka where it needs to be. To the men leading this country, I ask that they make a place for these talented women....because it needs the will of both women and men to ensure that 51% of our population and majority of graduates participate in the success of this country.

I would like to tell WIM how grateful I am for allowing me to take part in

this process. The WIM Top 50 Awards in its 11th year, I believe has single handedly propelled the consciousness of Sri Lankan women of the need to be better leaders and take ownership for the success of other women.

The panel of judges this year has been incredibly committed and well connected. They've taken time from their busy schedules to meet both physically and virtually and had long debates. I think we did justice to all the applicants. It's been a pleasure working with all of them.

On behalf of all the judges I would like to thank the WIM secretariate and Sulochana Segeru for the hard work they did in organizing the applications, checking references, finding

information. I would also like to thank the IFC and Australian Governments Women in Work programme for the invaluable support they give for these awards, their participation in the panel not being the least.

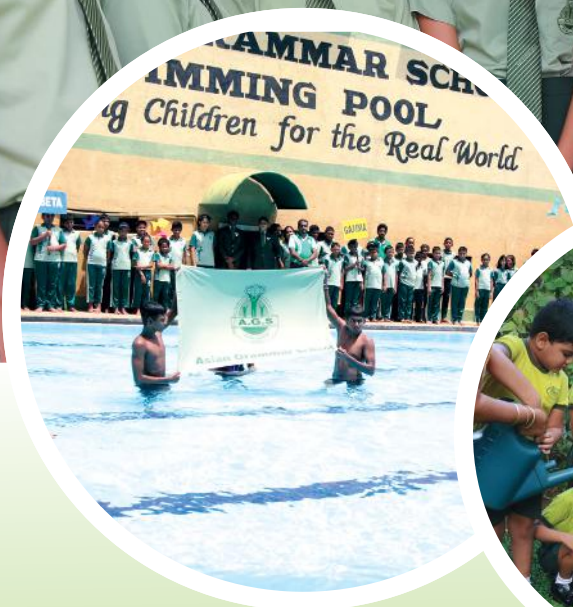
Nadija Tambiah,

Top50 Professional & Career Women Awards Chair Panel of Judges 2021

Head of Legal, Secretarial and Corporate Social Responsibility

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Grit and Grace: Celebrating a Resilient Stride

Decades of progress wiped out in two years by the COVID-19 pandemic; the wait is longer, from 99 years to 136 years to achieve complete gender parity.

The past two years have shifted gears for men and women across the world. We know women are impacted more by COVID-19 as they continue to bear the brunt of the virus. The pandemic significantly increased the burden of unpaid care – which is disproportionately carried by women. Globally, between 2019 and 2020, women's employment declined by 4.2 percent, representing a drop of 54 million jobs.

We need to 'build forward fairer' for economies and societies to build back better. You cannot achieve progress by leaving half the population behind – participation of women is a must in the fight to recover.

This year's 'Top50' Professional and Career Women Awards is a celebration of remarkable and resilient Sri Lankan women who have strived to achieve success in their respective fields amid a global pandemic. The women leaders and organizations accoladed this year have shown us the grit and grace manifested to push through yet another challenging year in their professions and everyday lives; inspiring and empowering others. They truly are trailblazers.

It is the seventh year in succession that IFC co-hosts the 'Top 50' Professional and Career Women Awards in partnership with Women in

Management (WIM). We believe that the IFC-WIM partnership has and will continue to make our vision of greater participation of women in business leadership positions.

Gender equality is at the heart of IFC's work. Globally, we have taken a comprehensive approach towards bridging the gender gap. We work with private sector institutions to enhance recruitment, retention, and promotion of women and other underserved groups. We also help companies increase women's access to financial services, technology, information, and markets.

To achieve a post pandemic sustainable recovery and growth, IFC is continuing to play a significant role in creating private sector opportunities that provide equal economic access to men and women, across regions and industries.

In Sri Lanka, the Women in Work partnership with the government of Australia, has been a great catalyst in increasing contribution of women in employment while ensuring greater business

performance. With COVID-19, we have doubled down these efforts to help strengthen women's participation in the private sector as leaders, employees, entrepreneurs, consumers, and stakeholders.

Diversity, inclusivity and equality are no matter of chance but of choice. They will create equal and better opportunities for all – men and women, both.

Today, we celebrate and honor the achievements of fifty special women who stood strong to wither the storm. Your roles don't stop here tonight, your grit and grace should be a beacon of light to many aspiring women, both young and old to make their mark by shattering the barriers as you have, to create the next generation of women leaders.

Let us then unite to make that change, and work together towards a resilient future for all.

My heartiest congratulations to all of those who have been nominated.



**Thank
you!**

Australia is proud to be supporting the

Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards 2021

Australia is proud to be supporting the Top 50 Professional and Career Women Awards 2021 through our Women in Work program. The awards have been recognising and celebrating Sri Lankan women leaders for their contributions to sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the country. Awards such as these, within the country, corporations and communities have led to more inspiring stories of Sri Lankan women entering the workforce and global market. It is even more important to encourage women to enter, and continue, in the workforce during COVID-19 as they face additional care responsibilities and safety concerns.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) collaborate on the Women in Work program, that seeks to increase the number of private sector players who adopt gender-smart business solutions and, as a result, report improvements in their performance. In anticipation of achieving this goal, greater diversity and inclusion in Sri Lanka will, in the long-term, lead to inclusive economic growth in Sri Lanka.

Congratulations to all the wonderful women receiving awards at the Top 50 Professional and Career Women Awards!



Amanda Jewell,
Acting Australian High
Commissioner for Sri Lanka



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**Ambassador
Grace Asirwatham**

What has been the single biggest factor in your success as a diplomat?

After graduating from university, I felt compelled to embark on a new endeavor, and joining the Foreign Service allowed me to start dreaming bigger for myself. As a young diplomat, my eagerness to learn and the habit of working hard emboldened me with an unmovable belief in myself, while alerting me early on that I could achieve more than I had thought with my career. I was enamored with the idea that there was only one life to live, and so I did not let any setbacks in life hinder my development as a professional.

What was your most difficult obstacle as a serving diplomat?

There have been many challenges in my journey but I do not find that any one obstacle stands out above the others. I have always felt that the difference between an obstacle and an opportunity is a matter of mentality.

As diplomats, we are required to embody that mentality to tackle problems swiftly. We need to be qualified, knowledgeable, articulate, confident, and good negotiators to carry out our duties. By cultivating this attitude in myself, I could not allow matters like gender or ethnicity to be an obstacle in the pathway to my goals.

Personally, however, moving my family every three years proved to be a difficult experience for my children. My husband realized the pressures of my work and sacrificed his profession as a lawyer to stay home with our children.

What has been the role of women in diplomacy for Sri Lanka?

While diplomacy has historically been generally male-dominated, I feel that the approach to the job will remain unique to each person, regardless of if that person is a man or a woman.

Grace Asirwatham, Ambassador for Sri Lanka in Belgium has served her country as a diplomat with integrity for more than three decades. As an international civil servant, she was the first Asian and a woman to occupy the post of Deputy Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), in The Hague, the Netherlands. While serving in Sri Lanka in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she was also the first woman SLFS member appointed to the post of Secretary to the State Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Recollecting with gratitude her many years in diplomacy, for Ms. Asirwatham, the most cherished memories from her career are related to the challenges that she overcame and the warm feelings of personal and professional progress.



Sri Lankan diplomacy too was largely male-dominated until the 1980s. While I was only the eighth woman to join the Sri Lanka Overseas Service in 1988, I am glad as now women make up 56% of the Sri Lanka Foreign Service. Throughout

my career, women diplomats have served and are serving in key positions in the Ministry and missions abroad as ambassadors, as well as in middle and junior diplomatic positions. We have stood up for Sri Lanka at the United Nations and various international and regional organizations. Sri Lanka only once had a female Minister for External Affairs, that was the late Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Nevertheless, women diplomats have consistently proved their prowess in all high positions including the foreign secretary, state secretary, chief of protocol, additional foreign secretary, director general as well as higher-held positions in the UN and international organizations.

The bottom line is whatever adversity I faced for being a woman paled in comparison to my determination to succeed as a woman. I cannot say truthfully that there was such a “glass ceiling” in the Foreign Service. The future looks bright for Sri Lanka’s women diplomats.

What is your response to the notion that being a diplomat makes it harder to get married and diplomats with children struggle to find a good life-work balance?

In all truth, the diplomatic life is far from glamorous. The demands of the job and changes to ways of life will inevitably be tough on families and marriages. Distances, staying apart and professional differences make marriage a tough proposition for any diplomat. In most cases, spouses of diplomats are not permitted to work in the country that their spouse has been posted to, and so it can be harder to find a workable life-work balance unless the spouse sacrifices. We have a considerable number of unmarried ladies in the Foreign Service, including in Sri Lanka. Having children can be tough for diplomats, and some

forego that option to further themselves professionally.

Having served your country for over three decades in diplomacy what is obstructing women from pursuing a career in diplomacy?

Women in diplomacy are considered to reflect the general status of a female in their own country. Historically the diplomatic service was dominated by men around the world, but nowadays this is no longer a viable plan, in a mutually dependent world where women matter.

Times are indeed changing. Now, women work in many fields on an equal basis with men. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a clear breakthrough in the feminization of foreign affairs agencies in the world.

The Diplomatic Service certainly offers various challenging and exciting opportunities for candidates, which is why the intake of recruits has increased over the years. In the Sri Lanka Foreign Service, since the late 1990s, far more women members than men have been appointed, which shows that there are no apparent 'big obstacles' preventing women from choosing a career in diplomacy. Sri Lanka's first woman diplomat joined our Overseas Service in 1958. At the time married women had to get special permission from the Public Service Commission if they were to be included in the final selection process. However, it was even worse in many countries as they asked women diplomats to choose between their career and marriage. Now in the Sri Lanka Foreign Service, there are no such restrictions; women diplomats are even allowed to marry foreigners.

At the end of the day, it depends on the national policies of a country and the type of diplomacy. This can involve security risks in postings to countries in war, countries struggling with drug-related crimes, or countries with which the sending country has conflicts. I fear that these risks could continue to discourage women from pursuing a career in diplomacy.

We must remember that this is a challenging job that continues to present



new challenges as time goes on. On a day-to-day basis, diplomatic service is not a nine-to-five job, we are on call 24/7 and called to perform many out-of-hour obligations which have to take precedence over family events.

There are traditional family responsibilities for women in our society. For some women, work-family balancing can present an overbearing obstacle to their job. Also, in any international job, working abroad is bound to pose challenges about maintaining marital relations and rearing a family. Even today, women are often faced with the dilemma of having to choose between their marriage and their career, simply because there is not enough infrastructural support

provided by the employment system. In most westernized nations, spouses are often given a monthly allowance for assisting the ambassador or diplomatic spouses, while at times providing spouses job opportunities in the same embassies. Such arrangements are not yet introduced in our system.

In our society, while it is normal for wives to accompany male ambassadors and diplomats to missions abroad and keep their families in tow, it appears that husbands are reluctant to leave their job to become diplomatic spouses as men often connect their careers to their social reputation. I consider myself fortunate to have a husband who loves his family above everything and was able to sacrifice large periods of his working life to take care of his family abroad.

Overall, I am optimistic that the remnants of global patriarchy are losing their battles against women. I feel that the world no longer considers women as weak, sensitive, defenseless, or passive. I see an increasingly forward-looking, reformist, and socially respectable world that increasingly includes women in positions of leadership.

There are an increasing number of global and regional issues which can only be managed through diplomatic processes and innovative diplomatic responses. From that standpoint, how has the art of diplomacy evolved over the years?

The primary objective of diplomacy is to guide peaceful and orderly relations between countries. Diplomacy has a long history rooted in established practices that

were subject to transformative changes within the twentieth century, adapting to the ramifications and new challenges in the aftermath of the World Wars.

At the end of the Cold War, the character of diplomacy changed due to the seismic change in the international agenda. This did away with much of the secrecy and confidentiality of the old diplomacy. On the contrary, contemporary diplomacy is open and public and not limited to war-time activities like peace-making, and peace negotiations.

The change came with the involvement of many actors such as international organizations, INGOs, transnational corporations, civil society members, and other non-state actors. This has diminished the role of diplomats in decision-making compared to war-time diplomacy, yet governmental diplomacy continued to maintain its place.

International organizations such as the UN and subject-specific organizations internationalized the issues of global interest for participatory diplomacy to find collective solutions for issues of common interest and for the implementation of conventions at national levels to achieve the desired goals. Thus, contemporary diplomacy has become a universal process of an enlarged diplomatic community. Collective engagement in multilateral diplomacy must include all common issues such as political, human rights, trade and economy, security, counter-terrorism, health, culture, environment, labor, drug control, poverty alleviation, and many other social issues. In the Sustainable Development Goals, 17 priority issues have been packaged for the world community to reach by 2030. SDGs are promoted through international, regional, and national mechanisms. Another example is mitigating climate change-related issues. During the United Nations Conference on Climate Change COP-16 Conference in Glasgow, the member countries adopted the Glasgow Climate Pact, aiming to turn the 2020s into a decade of climate action and support. All these issues used to be exclusively domestic issues. Now in all international organizations, national diplomats defend their country positions

and participate in the collective global and regional decision-making processes.

Furthermore, technological advancement in every field especially information technologies and modern communication change the process and character of diplomacy. Access to such technologies is vital as it makes information circulation swifter, requiring faster reactions from us as diplomats. The use of communication technologies for conducting diplomacy has changed how we structure our work to achieve our goals. Modern communications not only made countries interdependent but also initiated a chain reaction in human developments in certain regions.

Of course, in reaction to all of the developments in the world, the art of diplomacy will also be modified as such. More recently, the COVID-19 situation introduced a new set of challenges for us to complete our duties, thereby instigating webinars and teleconferencing as a mode of diplomacy.

After many years in service, is there anything you would have done differently?

As far as my diplomatic career is concerned, I would not have changed anything, as I was lucky to enjoy success with almost every challenge I faced. I feel that the decisions I made at every juncture took me as far as they could. I must say I experienced some difficulty balancing my home life with my career and I do wish I had pursued my Ph.D. earlier in my career.

What are some of the best memories you have as a diplomat?

There have been numerous happy and memorable occasions in my long career in the Foreign Service. I will recount the most striking ones which I remember so vividly.

One such occasion was the fallout surrounding the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. I was tasked as a member of the repatriation team to coordinate and arrange the repatriation of the Sri Lankan expatriates caught up and stranded in the Middle Eastern region. It was a different experience altogether. I saw the

distressed and desperate families of the stranded Sri Lankans abroad, pleading with the authorities for the safe return of their beloved ones. The repatriation team worked round the clock and completed the mission. I am still grateful that so early on in my career I could experience the human aspect of diplomacy, which is the most essential part of dealing with fellow citizens in distress within and outside the country.

Another memorable occasion was my stint in Nepal as Ambassador for nearly four years. At the time, Nepal was enduring a prolonged internal conflict, which sought a constitutional change in the country. Despite the strong winds of change in Nepal, I worked relentlessly to promote bilateral relations between the two countries. It was my first official posting as Ambassador and I enjoyed growing into the role and tackling each task; I returned to Sri Lanka fully satisfied with my performance. Soon after I returned, an organization in Kandy, Vishwa Padanama, conferred on me the honorary title of “SriLankabimanya Deshabandu Diriya Matha” in recognition of my services as Ambassador to Nepal to promote relations between the two countries. It was a surprise to me at the time and an honor that I hold in high esteem even today.

I can also never forget my time as the Deputy Director-General of the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Two years after I joined the OPCW, the organization was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts in eradicating the use of chemical weapons. It was an unforgettable moment in my career to have had the privilege of witnessing the prestigious award ceremony in Oslo along with the Director-General of the OPCW delegation.

All of my most cherished memories from my career are generally related to great challenges that I overcame and the warm feelings of personal and professional progress, all in service to Sri Lanka. I am grateful to have had a very fulfilling diplomatic journey of 33 years with memorable milestone achievements.



Celebrating remarkable female leaders in the Maldives

Professional & Career Women Awards Maldives 2021

WIM Maldives, a chapter opened in 2017 by WIM Sri Lanka, celebrated its third annual WIM Professional & Career Women Awards, Maldives on the 15th of December 2021 at the Hotel Jen, Male.

The event was graced by the President of the Maldives, His Excellency Ibrahim Mohammed Solih and the First Lady, HE Fazna Ahmed. Cabinet Ministers, Acting High Commissioner to Sri Lanka in Maldives, Mr. D. Amanullah and several other Corporate Leaders graced the event.

The Professional and Career Women Awards, founded by Dr. R. Sulochana Seger in 2011 in Sri Lanka, were conceived to provide a platform for the pipeline of female talent in Sri Lanka and Asia. Through the Professional and Career Women Award programme, WIM has built a global brand and has taken Sri Lankan brands to the international arena.

The WIM Maldivian Chapter, President Minha Faiz Rashaad said, “the Maldives has come a long way in achieving gender equality. Some key milestones include the Gender Equality Act, Domestic Violence Act, Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act, and Sexual Offences Act, Which have paved the way for women to



succeed in the Maldives.”

President Ibrahim Mohammed Solih said the administration’s Gender Equality Action Plan, part of its “National Resilience and Recovery Plan (NRR) 2020–2022,” intends to ensure gender equality by increasing women’s ability to participate equally in all state and national-level engagements and promoting the economic empowerment of women. He made the remarks while addressing the Professional and Career Women Awards 2021 ceremony. First Lady Fazna Ahmed accompanied the President at the function held at Hotel Jen.

The Woman of the Year award was presented to MAIMOONA ABOOBAKURU, Director General, Health Protection Agency, who were leading the COVID19 Pandemic emergency response services in Maldives. The Inspirational Woman of the Year was presented to the first female Taxi Driver in Male, Maldives, AMINATH WAHEEDA,

of Loyal Taxi Services. The Trail Blazer Award was presented to Farath Aibrahim, the only lady who operates heavy-load vehicles in the Maldives; Operator Gr-1 Maldives Port Limited.

In the legal category, the main award was bestowed upon UZA Aisha Shujune Muhammad, Justice, Supreme Court. Justice Aisha Shujune Muhammad is one of the first two female Justices appointed to the Supreme Court in 2019. WIM Maldives for the first time introduced a Youth Award and a Chairperson Award. The Chairperson Award was presented to DR. MINAH FAIZ RASHAD, Co-Founder and President, Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives

Kasturi Chelleraja, Group CEO, Hemas PLC and a panel Judge of WIM Maldives 2021, speaking on behalf of the Judges stated that, “this year the judging process was tougher than the previous years because during the lockdown



women leadership was highlighted more in Maldives and yet receiving reference and confirmation was a long process, but on behalf of the Panel of Judges we are so happy that we found the best recipients to take the WIM Maldives brand forward.”

This year’s panel of judges included, Dr. Mariyam Shakeela, CEO Simdi Group and the Honorary Consul of Belgium in the Maldives, Senior DIG Ajith Rohana, Sri Lanka Police, Ms. Mariyam Waheeda, Permanent Member of Maldives Scout and Guide Fellowship, Mr. Ahmed Afaal Managing Director, ADK Hospitals and Ms. Kasturi Chellaraja, Executive Director, Group CEO, HEMAS Group of Companies.

Dr. Sulochana Segera Founder and Chairperson of Women in Management said in her speech, “we all speak on Gender Equality but what we should remember is leadership or neither productivity has a gender. Maldives has progressed having 40% women in parliament while Sri Lanka is still struggling to achieve the allocated quota of 25% women in Local Government representation. This shows a country where men and women receive equal opportunity are able to grow their economy positively.” Participants and winners thanked Dr. Sulochana Segera for brining the WIM Awards to the Maldives, and for recognizing Maldivian female leadership.



Empowered Women for a Resilient Future

23 Women Top 50

Every day is a great day to celebrate the amazing women in our lives. The Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards goes the extra mile by recognizing remarkable women with an accolade of a lifetime. This award gives all women a reason to be exceptional, be it at their workplace and in their career, social work, or life, and be recognized.

Celebrated annually, this year marks the 11th edition of the Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards. It is organized by Women in Management (WIM), in partnership with IFC, a member of the World Bank Group and DFAT, under the theme "Empowered Women for a Resilient Future". I am humbled and honored to be part of this great event for 2021, where 50 outstanding women are being celebrated. I am thankful to Women in Management and especially to Dr. Sulochana Segera for giving me this opportunity to witness and be a part of an amazing process of revealing talented women. The eminent panel of judges has dedicated their time and energy to picking the most suitable women worthy of recognition. I am amazed by their commitment to the task given to them till the very end.

If you are a recipient of a Top50 Professional and Career Women award, your life story and career have touched the judges. This may be true of others who have crossed your path at any one

point in time. And your story will inspire many more who will need a gentle nudge to move forward in life. Sometimes you may feel that your story may not be as interesting as someone else's. But it is your story. It will be as unique and original as you are. So, tell it with your heart and soul and you will be heard, and you will be an inspiration to many.

As the recipient of the Supply Chain and Logistics Gold Award for the year 2020, I felt proud and honored. My respect and gratitude grew even further by witnessing how tedious and meticulous the awarding process is. As career women, we play

many different roles as a wife, mother, daughter, friend, relative, and more. We as women must understand, juggling all roles at the same time, perfectly will not be easy and will be at the expense of something else. That experience has helped me to be the best I can be whenever possible and not be upset over things that I have missed.

This award was an honor to me and my organization. It opened many doors to further my career. It helped my quest to reach out to help young professionals in the industry, especially girls to pursue a career in the supply chain and logistics industry.

All the women who have been celebrated by the Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards had once been ordinary women. Where they are today is because they thought differently and were resilient. With this prestigious award and honor comes the responsibility of mentoring and leading other women to take leadership roles and to become the best version of themselves.

Many women today have shattered the glass ceiling because other women before us had fought and stood up for their rights. Let us be thankful for being empowered and let us march forward with resilience.

Message
from the
Top50 Awards
Committee
Chair



Amali
Mudunkotuwa Mendis

**Top50 Awards
Committee Chair**

Top50 Professional & Career Women Awards Committee 2021



**Amali
Mudunkotuwa
Mendis -**
Top50 Awards
Committee Chair,
General Manager -
Operations - Regency
Teas (Pvt) Ltd



**Dr Himalee
de Silva**
Senior Lecturer
Institute of
Indigenous
Medicine
University of
Colombo



**Nilam
Samsudeen**
Director
Administration
Women in
Management



**Mayanthi
Fernando**
Director Zeilan Agro
Productions (Pvt) Ltd



**Vijitha
Samarakkodige**
Top50 Awards
Committee Deputy
Chair Corporate Trainer,
Mentor Sales Force
Driven Industries



**Waruni
Algama**
Senior GM -
User Experience
Design & Channel
Adoption , Dialog
Axiata PLC



Aparna
Tilakaratne
Chief Law Officer
Sri Lanka Ports Authority



Pushpa
Samarakkody -
Chief Executive Officer
Bacopa Worldwide (Pvt) Ltd



Dr. Thushari
Koralage
Principal/ Managing Director Asian
Grammar School and Giggles
International Montessori



Fazeela
Dharmaratne -
Proprietor - CeeBees Preschool and
Child Care Centre and Creche Services



Anjali
Goonetilake -
Senior Manager Operations
Sampath Bank PLC



Priyanwada
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Building Bridges through Diplomacy

Deepthika Priyadarshani Calyaneratne
Wickramarachchi Karunaratne
Ambassador for Sri Lanka in Lebanon and Syria



Currently reading for a Ph.D. in Tourism Studies at the University of Colombo, Deepthika Priyadarshani Calyaneratne Wickramarachchi Karunaratne is the Ambassador for Sri Lanka in Lebanon and Syria. In a career spanning over two decades, she has served in many countries and positions. Her training in conflict resolution, forced migration, refugees, and displaced persons has placed her in positions serving alongside governments and humanitarian agencies in relief efforts, compensation, and repatriation. A past winner at the WIM Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards, Ambassador Calyaneratne emerges as a dynamic career diplomatic ready for the challenge.

This may sound like an often-asked question. What was interesting and appealing in diplomacy that drove you to pursue it as a career?

At the time, I was interested in moving out of the University of Kelaniya where I worked as a tutor. There was a tremendous push factor so I thought of looking for other jobs and in the meantime, the gazette notification for Exams for Sri Lanka Foreign Service was issued to the public. At that time there were no preparation classes for the exam. I had access to the university library and I read what I could. I only knew that I could work at Sri Lanka embassies and high commissions worldwide and this notion, for a young person, was a great thing.

Upon entering the foreign service what did you learn differently from the expectation with which you entered it?

Having been a tutor and the students look up to me. Coming to the Foreign Office was like the first day in school! But I learned my work from Mr. C D Cassie Chetty to whom I was an apprentice. He let me watch him work and If I show finesse in my work, I want to give that credit to him. I also want to mention Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar who knew each one of us whom he “recruited “. We were called the new batch at that time, and he tried to give each one of us the space

to grow into what we were good at. He knew each one of us by name and even after many years, would address us by name.

Why do you think women are important in diplomacy and foreign service?

Women are not only important in the Foreign Service, but women are important in every sphere. I believe that not only in the Foreign Service but in any category of work, the contribution of both men and women are equally important. Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses and the collective responsibility of both men and women adds finesse and roundedness to a work atmosphere.

Can you share a formative experience that helped shape your leadership vision and/or style?

Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar and Mr. C D Cassie Chetty greatly contributed to shaping my leadership ability. They both allowed me to draft documents, speak up and one of the essential areas in the job of a diplomat is to be appropriately dressed for the occasion. During our training, we were given professional advice to minimize our flaws and accomplish great feats. I am greatly thankful for our training at the Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute. My batch of 1996 was the first batch to be trained full-time at the Diplomatic Institute.



Have you ever been subject to harassment or discrimination at work (here/abroad/in the process of serving)? And, if so, how did you handle it?

Harassment yes. Discrimination yes. But harassment is everywhere. Not only at work but society at large. I could write a book on this. However, the greatness is to overcome them. One way to do it is by education. Education is my wealth that no one could steal. We must rise above pettiness. People who harass others are weak.

Are there (or have there been) challenges that you face as a woman diplomat while working in countries considered not favorable particularly for women to work?

Occasionally, people call my husband "Ambassador". It happened recently as well at a hotel where my husband Andrew was called Ambassador and I, the spouse! We both thought it was



Having been a tutor and the students look up to me. Coming to the Foreign Office was like the first day in school! But I learned my work from Mr. C D Cassie Chetty to whom I was an apprentice. He let me watch him work and if I show finesse in my work, I want to give that credit to him.



funny.

Tell us about a time when your professional and family responsibilities came into conflict.

Long hours of work sometimes give me a conflict of interest. I cannot help that situation though. Now that my son is a young adult, he knows about his mother's work.

In an increasingly murky playing ground that we call diplomacy, what would be your advice to aspiring young diplomats to navigate through a complex setup?

This is not a very well-paying job compared to the private and multinational sectors. It is not a job but a way of life. Come and become a Diplomat if you can develop an aptitude for it. Diplomacy is an art. It is a science. And it is a way to live. In this field, things can be unpredictable at times. But this is what I love doing.



4th Annual Women **Top50** Conference Highlights







WIM Top50

4th Annual Conference Empowered Women for Resilient Future

WIM Top50 Fourth Annual Conference Empowered Women for Resilient Future. The fourth WIM Top50 Annual Conference took place on the 9th of November 2021 at the Kingsbury Hotel Colombo, with a diverse cohort of speakers coming together to share their post COVID19 leadership and new thinking under the theme “Empowered

Women for Resilient Future.”

It has been nearly two years into an unprecedented health and economic crisis that had destroyed lives and livelihoods globally and in Sri Lanka. This has been a problematic period particularly for Sri Lanka and her women.

Dr. Sulochana Segera, Chairperson of

Women in Management, stated that, the conference took place physically with 62 participants, with an additional 78 participants joining the conference virtually. We see lots of virtual programmes, but we don’t always see enough insight from these programmes, and this is partly because people still want to meet, which is why we’re putting on a mixture of physical and



virtual. The WIM Top Conference's objective, as always, is to discuss things not being discussed yet in the corporate world."

She further stated "even though the topic was indicated as pertaining solely to women, the intention of the conference was to focus on global leadership changes, the state of the economy and diversity. For the first time in the WIM Top50 Conference history we included a panel who spoke about the future of local entrepreneurship post COVID19. The selected speakers are not only from the corporate world, nor are they renowned Entrepreneurs. They hailed from the grassroot levels and they are the ones who really contribute to the country's GDP."

WIM Top50 Conference was launched by 2020 Conference Chair, Aparna Tillakaratne, WIM Executive Committee Member and Chief Law Officer at Sri Lanka Ports Authority. Aparna stated, "it was an honor and a privilege to be appointed as Conference Chair 2021 and WIM has always been a pillar of strength in my journey as a career woman and a responsible citizen who has a duty towards society. Eminent panelists including top business leaders, emerging entrepreneurs, professionals and media personalities, are all included in the 2021 conference line-up, and it's not just women but men as well; men who constantly support WIM's vision. One of the novel concepts at the conference was including and exposing young blood who we believed will emerge as the ones who will provide leadership

in the future. We firmly believed these new sessions was a motivation to the millennial and Gen Z kids."

The key note speaker of the event was Dr. Mohan Kaul, a champion of international trade, investment and emerging markets. Dr Mohan Kaul is an influential, well-connected and recognized policy adviser, business leader, social entrepreneur, development specialist and academic. His speech was followed by the first panel discussion of the conference: "Business and Financial Strategies." Every business has felt the financial pressures that Covid19 has caused. This forum focus on future consumer trends, financial technologies, and shared tips pertaining to the road to recovery. Moderated by Nisthar Cassim, Founder Editor and CEO Daily FT, will feature Dilith Jayaweera, Chairman, George Steuart & Company Ltd, Shashi Kandamb-Jassim, Senior Deputy General Manager, Sampath Bank PLC, Victor Antony Pillai, Country Officer Sri Lanka and Maldives, International Finance Corporation, and Nilushi Jayatileke, Marketing Director for Personal Care, Unilever Sri Lanka.

The second panel discussion was on - "Diversity and Inclusion" and was moderated by Santosh Menon, CEO, KL.LK. Santhosh stated that he was, "delighted to chair such a high caliber panel, the discussion on such relevant topics yield very insightful and meaningful points." Panel speakers were Sarah Twigg, Program Manager, Women in Work, International Finance Corporation, Hiran Cooray, Chairman,

She further stated "even though the topic was indicated as pertaining solely to women, the intention of the conference was to focus on global leadership changes, the state of the economy and diversity. For the first time in the WIM Top50 Conference history we included a panel who spoke about the future of local entrepreneurship post COVID19. The selected speakers are not only from the corporate world, nor are they renowned Entrepreneurs. They hailed from the grassroot levels and they are the ones who really contribute to the country's GDP."

Jetwing Sri Lanka, Tania Polonnowita Wettimunny, Entrepreneur and Group Managing Director, IAS Holdings (PVT) Limited, Ananya Sabharwal, Director HR, Unilever Sri Lanka, and Bani Chandrasena, Independent Consultant, Diversity Collective on Inclusion, SLASSCOM.

Dr. Sulochana Seger, Founder and Chairperson of Women in Management delivered her topic on - "When You Hit Rock Bottom" and her speech was followed by the third panel discussion - "The Social Shakeup." The panel was moderated by Waruni Algama, Senior General Manager, User Experience Design and Channel Adoption, Dialog

Axiata PLC. Waruni stated that the discussion was focused on “how to use social media effectively to brand ourselves, how to utilize it to build our corporate brands and how to take our brands forward.” The speakers of this panel was all media professionals and includes Indeewari Amuwatte, General Manager, TV Derana, Rasika Jayakody, Author and Media Personality, Rishini Weeraratne, Head of Social Media, Wijeya Newspapers Limited and the Editor of The Weekend Online (Daily Mirror), HI!! Online and WNow Sinhala and WNow English, Milinda Rajapaksa, Additional Director General, Department of Government Information and the Director, Media Centre for National Development.

The fourth panel was in Sinhala and the topic was - “Women who run the economy.” This session was moderated by Mayanthi Fernando, WIM Executive Committee Member and Secretary. The panel speakers was Chathurika Wickremasinghe, Managing Director,

Adventa Holdings PVT Limited, Dr. Iresha Udayangani Silva, (B.A.M.S), Proprietor, Seth Ulpatha Ayurveda Weda Medura, Dadallage Sriyani, Proprietor, Devithuru Caterers and Sureka Edirisinghe, Women Development Officer, Ampara District Secretariat.

The conference was conclude with the topic - “New Generation Leadership.” This session was moderated by Dr. Sulochana Seger. Forum speakers was Sajindu Perera, Head of Management Information and Finance Integration, MAS Intimates (PVT) Ltd, Mohammed Fawaz, Founder, Curve Up and Consultant, Resilience Gender Inclusive Enterprise Systems (Oxfam) and ENTERPRISE (Chrysalis), Sachitha Kalingamudali, Senior Manager -Digital Media, Derana Macro Entertainment, Anna-Marie Ondaatje, a Quint Ondaatje Foundation Goodwill Ambassador, 3 AQO Sports and Entertainment (AQOSE), Savini Tennakoon, Deputy Principal – Academic, Asian Grammar School, Colombo

The speakers of this panel was all media professionals and includes Indeewari Amuwatte, General Manager, TV Derana, Rasika Jayakody, Author and Media Personality, Rishini Weeraratne, Head of Social Media, Wijeya Newspapers Limited and the Editor of The Weekend Online (Daily Mirror), HI!! Online and WNow Sinhala and WNow English, Milinda Rajapaksa, Additional Director General, Department of Government Information and the Director, Media Centre for National Development.

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Transforming the Beauty Industry into a Weapon of Expression

Ramani Arsecularatne

Yours has been a slow but steady journey in the beauty and skincare industry. And today the Ramani Arsecularatne International Academy of Cosmetology (RAIAC) and the Christell Skin Clinic are well-known and successful entities in Sri Lanka, acknowledged with several awards. So, tell us how Ramani Arsecularatne, the successful entrepreneur was

groomed to be what she is today?

My professional life started with a successful job in accounting at a leading Japanese company for many years before I got married. As soon as we got married my husband had to move to Randenigala as he was involved in the Rantambe hydropower project. Staying away from him as a newly married couple proved to be difficult and hence, I decided to leave my job to move with him to Randenigala.

My journey started with a trip I did with him to Japan. While in Japan I followed a floristry course. Then as a mother, I dedicated my time taking care of my daughter while enjoying doing creative things at home to keep myself occupied.

As I was completely dependent on my

husband, my dream was to start something on my own from home to earn a steady income. This was the circumstance of most wives at that time. I had a dream of helping women in similar situations become independent. What started as a floristry and vegetable carving class with three students, later became an academy with over 100 courses. I was able to empower a generation of over 30,000

Ramani Arsecularatne is a doyen in Sri Lanka's beauty industry. An entrepreneur who has carved a successful career through sheer hard work and savvy business acumen, Ramani through her academy has educated thousands of women and men and helped them become economically empowered. Today, the Christell Skin Clinic is another business venture managed with her daughter providing an array of treatments as a medical cosmetic clinic. As the only ISO-certified clinic in Sri Lanka, Ramani claims that cosmetic treatments have become mainstream today, although a decade ago using them to improve one's appearance to build confidence was considered taboo. Here she shares her journey and reveals that their commitment and investment in quality is what has helped her business grow from strength to strength.



women to become self-employed and contribute meaningfully to their families and country.

When requirements changed, I adapted and shifted to beauty and cosmetology. My academy became the sought-after place for young girls and boys seeking qualifications in this area. I'm proud to say that through my partnerships with Victoria University in Australia I was able to give migrating options to many women.

As the beauty education industry became mainstream, I had to adapt yet again. In response, I started Christell Skin Solutions which provided the latest cosmetic treatments in Sri Lanka. I'm happy to say that my daughter followed my footsteps and

together we started Christell Skin Clinic which is now the leading wellness provider in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

In an increasingly crowded space that we describe as the cosmetic and beauty industry filled with fantasy concoctions, spin doctors, and hustlers, how do you maintain recognition and credibility especially when it comes to concerns with safety? How do you maintain client confidence?

We believe in trust and in providing the best quality treatments and procedures for our clients. Hence, we constantly keep abreast of the latest technologies and products in the world and introduce them to Sri Lanka. We don't just do consultations and prescribe products. We are with our clients through their journey until we can bring out the best in them. We are proud to say that after 35,000 clients they are our best advocates. More than 50% of the new clients come from word of mouth. Hence, we ensure that we manage them exceptionally well and adjust the treatments to suit them.

As the only ISO-certified clinic in Sri Lanka, we are proud to say that quality is built-in to our day-to-day operations. We ensure that we continue to maintain the highest quality comparable to any in the world.

Do you think the beauty industry is sorely misunderstood

and portrayed negatively?

A decade ago, using cosmetic treatments to improve one's appearance to build confidence was considered taboo. In response, we invested in continuous education to change this mindset of the Sri

Lankan consumers which we are proud to say has taken the industry to mainstream. Those who discouraged cosmetic treatments and our clinic are now performing those same treatments and opening clinics.

While the trend today is good for the overall industry, our ambition is to make Sri Lanka a cosmetic hub in the future. However, using bad-quality products and treatments tends to give this area a bad name.

With a greater emphasis and focus on sustainability today, have you ever focused on aspects such as biodegradable fragrances, environmental and societal impact, combining luxury and sustainability and, alternative materials?

We strongly believe in sustainability and alternative medicine. Hence, we introduced Christell Luxury Ayurveda as part of our holistic wellness solution. All products we use are sourced from companies that follow sustainable business practices. Some of the lines are also vegan. We are also in the process of developing our natural product line which will combine the best of luxury and sustainability.

The treatments and procedures offered are often touted as providing the much-needed confidence and poise in women. Research however suggests the contrary. What are your thoughts on the findings that unrealistic images of beauty have

We are proud to say that after 35,000 clients they are our best advocates. More than 50% of the new clients come from word of mouth. Hence, we ensure that we manage them exceptionally well and adjust the treatments to suit them.



resulted in anxiety, low self-esteem, and low self-confidence in many women?

Too much of any good thing and addiction towards unrealistic expectations are harmful in any case. Even though some research does show this, it's also proven that confidence improves social relationships, mental well-being, and productivity. Thereby it helps improve the quality of life.

At our clinic, we promote realistic expectations. All our marketing is done with real images. This way, the customer understands what is achievable.

What are some of the challenges faced by your business and what competitive strategies are implemented?

Unqualified providers use low-quality machines and products, and offer services at lower prices. To combat this, continuous education on quality standards and low-quality unregulated products is important.

Sri Lanka unfortunately has no standardization matching global standards. Christell is the only ISO-certified clinic in the country. We continue to receive awards for our practices, which ensures that we maintain the highest standards.

Another challenge is the unrealistic expectations of certain clients, such as considering skin whitening as healthy skin. Again, educating the general public as well as customers seeking such procedures is crucial.

What is likely to be the beauty industry trends for 2022?

Growth in non-surgical procedures for contouring, high-end skin regenerating treatments such as stem cells, and overall wellness treatments coupled with the best of east and west.

As an industry topnotch can you tell us the basis on which you were bestowed with the honor of a professorship?

While I built my own business, I was also keen to give back to the country and stimulate female entrepreneurship. In response, I have given countless free courses to war widows and other underprivileged women. That opportunity helped them secure a strong background and has helped them stand on their feet. In addition, I worked to develop the cosmetology industry and education by developing courses for Sri Lankan universities. Moreover, the academy was a world-class institution providing tertiary, vocational, and cosmetology courses which were recognized by foreign missions for skilled migration. And mine was the only academy in Sri Lanka to have exchange programs with Victoria University Australia. These are some of the achievements that brought me recognition as the only professor of cosmetology and the Vishwa Keerthi Diriya Kantha award.

Finally, how does it feel to be recognized at the Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards?

I feel genuinely humbled and proud that today's generation is appreciating and recognizing my 30 years of hard work.

Like WIM, many organizations are working with women and helping them to find economic independence through various initiatives. As an individual who has worked tirelessly to make a difference in women's lives, by making them look better, is there anything that you could contribute to help in a cause such as women's empowerment?

The main purpose of the academy was to provide economic empowerment to women. I'm proud to say this was done for over 30,000 women. Today, through the clinic we are providing a path to many women to gain confidence, self-worth, and mental wellbeing, which positively contributes to their professional careers.



Too much of any good thing and addiction towards unrealistic expectations are harmful in any case. Even though some research does show this, it's also proven that confidence improves social relationships, mental well-being, and productivity. Thereby it helps improve the quality of life.








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I want every customer of mine to feel important

Gitanjali Chakravarthy Haaland is the first Sri Lankan woman General Manager for an international hospitality company, Hilton Yala Resort, scheduled for opening in 2022. She is also the first woman Vice President of the Ceylon Hotel School Graduates Association.

With a remarkable global career in hospitality spanning three decades, Gitanjali's journey to the top from trainee to executive was led by passion, commitment, and a positive attitude. As an individual who rejects failure, hard work is the key to her success. Describing hospitality as a happy industry, Gitanjali considers her job as an opportunity to delight customers through service excellence. As she prepares for the opening of the Hilton Yala Resort, Gitanjali is upbeat about the future, aiming to reach greater heights in the years ahead.

Gitanjali Chakravarthy Haaland

How did you get into this career?

I got into hospitality by accident. My childhood dream was to be a doctor. Dreams don't always come true. But I have no regrets. I believe that I have chosen a happy industry that wakes me up every morning excited and inspired to go to work and make a difference in someone else's life.

After my Advanced Level, I was mulling about my next step and a visit to one of the five-star hotels, with smartly clad staff, big smiles, happy faces, and the good food got me into hospitality.

You've had an extensive career in a very customer-centric industry, which in most instances is demanding and requires one to be proactive and quick. What does a good work

environment look like to you?

To me, a good work environment is where my contribution is valued. A place where my colleagues and I can be happy.

Needless to say, the customer is the livelihood of our industry. I want every customer of mine to feel important. I don't see customers as demanding. Instead, as an opportunity given to delight and serve them better. Difficult customers bring the best in us. All we have to do is embrace learning from every difficult situation. I have dealt with many demanding customers and today many of them have become our regulars. Some of them are close friends who follow me to every hotel I move into. Having said that, I feel that no one



will be difficult and demanding if we can anticipate their needs, be proactive and quick in responding.

I don't hesitate to go over and beyond to exceed the expectations of not only my external guests but also the internal team. I have, and will always appreciate that the happiness of an external customer is a reflection of the happiness of the internal team, the core of our business.

At all times I try my best to have a strong mindset and utilize my skills, knowledge, experience, and also emotions to pursue what I want to achieve and never wait for success to come to me.

What is it in your personality or about you that has helped you to succeed in hospitality, starting from trainee level to reach executive positions? How do you stay positive and motivated during especially challenging tasks?

One needs many traits to be successful in any industry. As hospitality is people-centric whilst being committed, passionate, possessing a great positive attitude, exceptional attention to detail, being a team player with a contagious enthusiasm is a must.

I started my journey in hospitality as a trainee in 1989. At the age of 21, I became a department head. I was ready to accept responsibilities, worked long hours, and was eager to learn. I loved my job as a trainee many decades ago and today I love my job as a General Manager. My love for hospitality has grown over the years, so have I as a person.

My passion for hospitality has always

helped me to be positive. I don't like failures. If one has the thirst to succeed and achieve goals, hard work is key. I kept myself motivated and remained positive even through challenging times by doing my utmost. Not rushing and taking little steps along the way brought me closer to achieving my dreams.

You've served extensively in the region and South East Asia and briefly outside. How did you adapt to the change in your work environment?

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Needless to say, the customer is the livelihood of our industry

What did you learn in terms of culture, customs, and acceptance when working with different team members/nationalities? Is there any experience that you would like to share?

I have been away from Sri Lanka for almost 12 years working in many different environments. I went with an open mind to every new place. As the saying goes, When in Rome – Do as Romans do is what I followed. When

we are in others territories, we have to respect their culture and be ready to learn, adapt and compromise. I had to develop my level of patience, understand that every individual is different and find ways to interact with them. That attitude helped me to work together with my teams efficiently and effectively.

During the last seven years of my time working overseas, my job entailed frequent travel which got me working in a different country every three to four weeks. Short tenures didn't allow me the opportunity to learn their native languages. However, when I was requested to be a part of their religious events I happily did so, dressed in their traditional attire. I attended funerals, following practices and rituals they



believed in. These little gestures helped me to get into the hearts of the local people, where they didn't see me as a foreigner.

I fondly remember my time in Bhutan, Bali, Thailand, and consider the times in Miami, the Maldives, and the Caribbean as the most challenging, yet rewarding as I learned a great deal working with teams of different ethnicities.

What have been some of the most rewarding aspects of your extensive career? Would you tell us some of the memorable experiences that you've had serving in various parts of the world?

The most rewarding aspect was becoming Group Rooms Division Director for a global hospitality brand within five years of joining. That took me places allowing me to stay in the company's most luxurious hotels. During this time I was also recognized as the manager to achieve the highest personal development review scores resulting in rooms division of all the hotels globally earning the highest leading quality assurance scores. I never allowed my teams to compromise on quality. I created a friendly competitive culture, where everyone wanted to outperform the other. This made all of us win as a team.

I was also fortunate to indulge in food prepared by award-winning chefs. Food plays a very important aspect of guests' overall satisfaction. I try my best to ensure the food served in the hotels I work, is of international standards, although the focus is given to locally sourced ingredients.

There was a great deal of hype in the media about you making history as the first woman to be appointed as the Vice President of the Ceylon Hotel School Graduates Association. What took so long for the CHSGA to appoint a woman in the industry to its top positions?

Yes, it has taken 50 long years for

CHSGA to appoint a female to one of the senior office-bearer positions making me the first woman Vice President. On a positive note, although it has taken this long, finally during the 50th Annual General Meeting I was appointed the Vice President. I am honored by this achievement. This gives hope that hospitality is becoming a better industry for all women out there.

What exactly are the roles and objectives of the CHSGA?

The CHSGA is the alumni association of the Ceylon Hotel School Graduates Association currently known as the Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management (SLITHM). The association was established in 1971. It is the only association of the tourism industry to be incorporated by an Act of the Parliament of Sri Lanka. Our main objective is to serve the industry

It's a fact that the hospitality industry has for long been male-dominated. When I started, there were just a handful of women in the industry. That was mainly due to socio-demographic and personal factors, which to date are seen as a challenge, especially in the rural areas. But the dynamics in the hotel industry are changing and it's on the right path to taking women in leadership more seriously.

while assisting the SLITHM. We are recognized as an association of eminent hospitality professionals assisting to uplift the standards of hospitality in Sri Lanka.

As the Vice President of the CHSGA, are you in a position to impact an industry that has been adversely affected by the current circumstances?

Of course, I am very confident that we

can make a difference. We are known as a body that has, through the years contributed to society with our CSR initiatives. I am also the chairperson of the CSR sub-committee of the CHSGA.

The last two years were extremely challenging for everyone in hospitality. The industry was severely impacted post-Easter Sunday attack. As we were raising our heads we were hit by the pandemic. Most of the interns in hotels who were students of the SLITHM lost employment. The CHSGA came forward and offered assistance to students and also to our members who were facing challenges financially. We also established a Covid Helpline to offer assistance to our members.

In 2021, the association and its members contributed much-needed medical equipment to hospitals in remote locations. We are taking small steps in the right direction.

Given that I am heading CSR allows me to organize many activities to help the needy.

Under the theme Chance to Change, we are embarking on three different initiatives in 2022. The first project is Help Us – Help Others, which will provide a nutritious meal to school children. Around 18 schools in different regions are identified. With the support of the hotels in those regions, the CHSGA will launch this initiative in the coming weeks.

We are also collecting funds through different initiatives to install a Reverse Osmosis Plant in Anuradhapura to give people clean drinking water and save lives lost to chronic kidney diseases. We also hope to establish a library in a school in Vakarai which will facilitate the learning of approximately 800 students.

We have also volunteered to share our knowledge, skills, and experience with the students of SLITHM, the future generation of hospitality, by involving experienced hospitality professionals and members of the CHSGA to conduct guest lectures.

If women in the hotel industry have shied away from pursuing leadership positions in the past, do you see a positive or negative change to this trend now?

It's a fact that the hospitality industry has for long been male-dominated. When I started, there were just a handful of women in the industry. That was mainly due to socio-demographic and personal factors, which to date are seen as a challenge, especially in the rural areas. But the dynamics in the hotel industry are changing and it's on the right path to taking women in leadership more seriously. More global brands are focusing on giving opportunities for women to break the glass ceiling by coming forward for leadership roles by creating women-friendly work environments. They are helping women to focus on work while balancing personal lives.

What are your interests outside work, especially in the area of community service?

I get immense satisfaction and happiness by helping people in need. My first sizeable project was to provide a home for a single mother and her two daughters. The company I worked for and some of my valued guests contributed towards building a two-bedroom, furnished house for them.

The second such project was to build a house for a needy family, who once lived a comfortable life, losing all that they had due to an unfortunate accident of their only son who was a final year medical student, confined to a wheelchair. This initiative too was supported by my family and close friends.

While I was working in a hotel in a remote location I made it a practice to give school books to the children of my team members on the 1st of January every year.

In the first few months of the pandemic, I together with my family and friends, organized a food drive donating dry rations to 125 families.

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I get immense satisfaction and happiness by helping people in need. My first sizeable project was to provide a home for a single mother and her two daughters. The company I worked for and some of my valued guests contributed towards building a two-bedroom, furnished house for them.

Every opportunity I get to help someone in need is never gone unnoticed. To me happiness is not what I have, but what I share with others to make a meaningful difference in their lives.

You have been a recipient of many awards, including the WIM Top50 Professional and Career Women Award for Sri Lanka's Woman Leader in Hospitability (Gold category). Personally, what has it done to you and its importance in your line of work?

I am proud of what I have achieved. I am grateful to my family and all my colleagues for their support that has helped me come thus far.

An award is a recognition for an individual's contributions through hard work and commitment. Recognition is a key motivational factor.

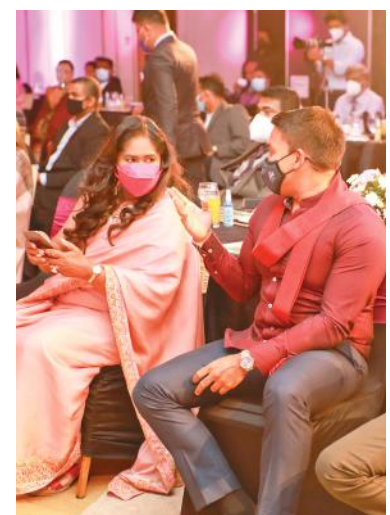
By receiving awards I have gained respect and recognition in the industry. They have helped me to push myself to set more goals and work harder to achieve them.





Highlights of the 2nd New Generation Awards 2021 under the theme of 'ARISE SHINE' Powered by 'SLT Mobitel' organized by Women in Management New Generation Chapter together with National Youth Service Council will now commence.





A photograph of Queen Elizabeth II and Saroja Sirisena in a formal room. Queen Elizabeth II, on the left, is wearing a white dress with blue floral patterns and a pearl necklace. Saroja Sirisena, on the right, is wearing a pink and gold patterned sari. They are standing in front of a large, ornate, gilded desk with a painting of a man on a horse hanging on the wall behind them. The room has large columns and a patterned rug.

Serving in her Dream Job

Saroja Sirisena
High Commissioner for
Sri Lanka in the United Kingdom

Has life as a diplomat been your dream job?

Yes, it is my dream job. When I decided after my O/Levels that I did not want to follow in my parents' footsteps, by being a doctor, I oriented my studies towards becoming a diplomat. Being educated in a particular field does not guarantee that you always get to work in it. It is a competitive field, we had to go through a rigorous process of examinations. I am fortunate to have made it.

What is the one skill or characteristic that you think is essential to being a

good diplomat?

Communication would be my pick. Even if you have a great brief, without good communication skills and people skills it would not be possible to convey your message. Good communication requires great listening skills, as they go hand in hand. To communicate with your interlocutor, you need to listen and understand.

What is your opinion on the common notion that there exists gender hierarchy in diplomacy or that women are not being used enough to fill diplomatic roles?

Sri Lanka is a very special case. As of today, our female career diplomats outnumber male career diplomats. This is not the case even in developed countries. However, this was not so in the 20th century. I think the personal instability of moving one's

Saroja Sirisena, High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in the United Kingdom is doing her dream job with great aplomb and vigor. In her important position as Sri Lanka's envoy, she declares that there are no second chances at a first impression. Hence, she always steps out to serve her country with her best foot forward. Good communication and great listening skills are her tools of diplomacy. As a career diplomat who has honed her diplomacy skills serving in dynamic positions for over two decades, Ms. Sirisena considers herself immensely privileged to be part of Sri Lanka's foreign relations legacy.

home for each assignment and needing a whole family to relocate would be the primary reason for the relatively low level of female participation in diplomacy. Despite that Sri Lanka has had a significant number of prominent female diplomats since independence.

Can you name a person who has had a significant impact on you as a diplomat?

The late Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar. His contribution to Sri Lanka's standing in the world still resonates. I was privileged to have learned from him and am still inspired by him.

How challenging is the art of diplomacy, especially when you feel like speaking your mind but have to maintain the

expected diplomatic dignity?

You can never forget that you are speaking on behalf of your country and not merely yourself. So, the challenge is to achieve the balance of conveying

I think the personal instability of moving one's home for each assignment and needing a whole family to relocate would be the primary reason for the relatively low level of female participation in diplomacy. Despite that Sri Lanka has had a significant number of prominent female diplomats since independence.





your point whilst keeping the space open for further discussion if needed. Sometimes it is necessary to be candid to convey the country's position. One needs to learn to be diplomatically so!

What are the contemporary issues that present challenges to diplomatic practitioners?

COVID has been one of the biggest challenges to furthering diplomacy on multiple fronts. The inability to meet your interlocutors in person. Diplomacy cannot be replaced by

an online meeting, especially if you are meeting for the first time. The economic challenges posed by COVID, not just for Sri Lanka, but across the globe, means that the competition for the limited economic resources and opportunities has increased exponentially and you must make sure your country's interests are represented.

What are the most important lessons that you have learned as a career diplomat?

There are no second chances at a first impression, so always; best foot forward. Listening is as important as communicating. There is no substitute for knowledge, learning about your host country and interlocutors is as important as knowing your brief. Foreign Relations is the legacy of your country in the world, I feel I am immensely privileged to be part of it.

As a winner of the WIM Top50 Professional and Career Women Awards, how has that recognition helped you in your career?

It is the first award I received in my career. It was overwhelming to be recognized and to be part of a body that encompasses wonderful, hardworking women who encourage each other's growth.

There are no second chances at a first impression, so always; best foot forward. Listening is as important as communicating. There is no substitute for knowledge, learning about your host country and interlocutors is as important as knowing your brief. Foreign Relations is the legacy of your country in the world, I feel I am immensely privileged to be part of it.



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